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SUBJECT: "DEMOCRACY WITHOUT COMPROMISE"; STRENGTH WITHOUT
MAJORITY: FIDESZ PARTY CONGRESS

Classified By: POL/C ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: FIDESZ held its 21st party congress in Gyor November 25, introducing its new theme of "democracy without compromise," emphasizing its commitment to the politics of inclusion, and taking steps to tighten Viktor Orban's control over several newly-created local party fora. End Summary.

THE DILEMMA OF STRENGTH WITHOUT MAJORITY

¶2. (SBU) Although the event opened with a long video tribute to recently-deceased Hungarian soccer legend Ferenc Puskas, the weekend got off to a rough start for FIDESZ with Friday's publication of photos of a minor party official in SS regalia. Despite quick action to expel him from the party, the episode did little to polish FIDESZ's image.

¶3. (SBU) Following clips of his gold medal performance in the Seoul Olympics men's gymnastics competition, newly-elected Gyor Mayor Zsolt Borkai framed FIDESZ's central dilemma in his welcoming remarks: how can the party turn its local strength into national victory?

¶4. (SBU) FIDESZ faction leader Tibor Navracsics echoed this theme in his address, challenging the party faithful to work to secure a parliamentary majority in the next national election. Describing FIDESZ as "the most diverse, most popular, and most tolerant" party in Hungary, Navracsics cited strong ties to Hungarian communities abroad, to the Roma community, to civic organizations including the MAGASZ farmers association, to other conservative European parties, and to those "of all generations and all faiths committed to the ideal of a civic Hungary."

¶5. (SBU) Turning his sights on the Gyurcsany government, Navracsics blamed the PM for creating a "crisis of Hungarian democracy." The government, he charged, has "treated the national budget as Gyurcsany's private account," attempting to run the country by "shadow committees" beyond parliament's oversight. In response, he called on the party to engage substantively to promote its key themes of: Economic and Social Justice; Quality of Life; Public Services; and, Competitiveness.

ENFORCING PARTY DISCIPLINE

¶6. (C) Several of the party's most prominent up-and-comers were conspicuously sidelined. MP and Mayor of Budapest's Castle District Tamas Gabor Nagy was relegated to a minor procedural role, and Budapest's District V Mayor Antal Rogan attended only as a spectator. Debrecen Mayor Lajos Kosa, a founding member of the party, was limited to presiding over open discussion of the party's platform. (Note: Kosa did make the most of this role, however, defusing an embarrassing moment when a speaker from the crowd unfurled the "Arpad

flag" associated with the WW II - era Arrow Cross by commenting "this certainly proves that we are the most ... diverse party." End Note.)

17. (SBU) The structural changes adopted by the convention appear intended to both recognize the growing importance of grass-roots activism and reduce the chances that rivals to Orban - such as Kosa - will be able to use local fora as a stepping-stone to national prominence. Both of the new bodies introduced by the party to coordinate regional efforts will report directly to Orban, a step political scientist Zoltan Kiszely described as "new webs for the same spider." In another move designed to enforce party discipline, a new by-law calls for the immediate and automatic expulsion of any party member who challenges a chosen FIDESZ candidate in an election.

ENTER ORBAN ... AGAIN

18. (SBU) Party president Viktor Orban received a standing ovation for his keynote address, which denounced PM Gyurcsany as a "charlatan" and a "buffoon" responsible for Hungary's "moral degradation." Speaking for a near-record one hour, Orban emphasized FIDESZ's strength at the local and regional level and asserted that "the nation cannot be in opposition." He identified the party's priorities as exposing "the Socialists' lies," organizing reforms at the local level, and preparing for a referendum next year.

19. (C) Comment: Imperfectly scripted and sparsely attended, the convention was an awkward coming-out party for the "new" FIDESZ, perhaps best captured when one attendee removed his suit jacket to expose a sleeveless shirt underneath. Navracsics' call for substantive engagement on the issues is a step in the right direction, but there is little new in the

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party's populist and reflexively negative rhetoric. Comments that Hungarians "live worse than we did four years ago" - FIDESZ's unsuccessful campaign slogan in the last national elections - were heard throughout the speeches, and there were few solutions proposed. While the party does have significant local strength to build on following the local elections, Orban's moves to keep real decision-making authority in his own hands make it increasingly apparent that he wants diversity without rivalry. Although his personal appeal remains FIDESZ's greatest strength, his personal leadership is often the party's greatest weakness. There is a natural tension between Orban's policy of "excommunication" and local FIDESZ officials' interest in working with the government, and it remains to be seen whether the party is giving him his own way ... or giving him more rope. End Comment.

FOLEY